

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, June 8, 1898, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Bhreagh, C. B.  
Wednesday, June 8, 1898. Mrs. A. G. Bell, 1331 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C.  
Dear Mabel:

So dear little Daisy wants to go to Cuba and nurse the wounded soldiers and feed the reconcentrados — at least so I understand from your telegrams just received. At first I was inclined to think it a joke — but you would hardly have sent a telegram had there not been something serious behind it — and to treat as ridiculous a serious thought of a loving heart would only wound Daisy and accomplish no good. Mr. McCurdy suggested that I should condense all my attempted replies into one word and send you the following brief but expressive telegram:

Mrs. A. Graham Bell, Washington, D. C. RATS! AGB.

I wonder what you would all have said to such a communication on that!

I am proud that my little girl has spirit enough and heart enough to want to go to the rescue of the suffering — it is just like her — always wanting to help others — even at her own expense.

I wish I could do something myself — and no doubt we all can — but the time has not come. It is certainly not 2 necessary for of us to risk our own lives and health by going to unhealthy Cuba in the rainy season. Even the soldiers are chosen preferably from persons immune to yellow fever. Nurses certainly should be immunes especially those who go to Cuba at this season.

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It is a grand thing to risk one's life for others — but where it is unnecessary it is a foolish thing to do — and a wicked thing as well. If duty demands it — that is another matter. But there is no duty — compelling any of us to run risks for ourselves or our country in Cuba.

Just think what a fool Hobson would have been to have run into the entrance of Santiago Harbor — just for the fun of the thing! And yet that same act done under the pressure of duty — and with an object worthy of the sacrifice of himself and his brave companions — if need be — became heroic. But it demanded preparation — and fitness for the work. It would have been culpable upon Sampson's part — to have allowed an inexperienced green-horn to have attempted the deed. Any youngster in the Navy with the spirit of a fly — would have been glad of the opportunity of attempting a daring deed — for the honor of his country and the glory of his flag — and as a matter of newspaper fact — the whole Navy volunteered for the dangerous work.

But would Sampson have been justified in allowing anyone to go? Certainly not. It was his duty to pick out 3 from volunteers those who seemed best fitted for the dangerous work — and (in view of the danger) — so few of these as possible — and absolutely debar all others from the Adventure.

Now what does Daisy want in Cuba? Does she want to go merely for the fun of the thing? — for a sentiment only? If so — while the sentiment of course is an honorable thing — showing her good heart and spirit — to put it into execution would be foolish — and even culpable — considering the danger involved. As foolish — as — from sentiment and pity — to nurse a smallpox patient without having been vaccinated or having herself had the disease — with lots of immune nurses at hand to attend to the case. If no immune nurses were to be had — and the patient were her own dear mother — or — or — or father? — there might be some duty about the matter — compelling a proper spirited girl to run some risk for the sake of others — but none of these points apply to Cuba.

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You and I and the Red Cross Authorities would be culpable to allow a young girl — not immune to yellow fever — to venture into Cuba now when immunes are to be had. If it is a sincere desire to help the helpless that dictates the desire — then it should be the duty of wiser heads to show her that nurses not immune themselves — are more likely to add to the list of helpless — than to be of help themselves.

Then again it should be the duty of those in authority to see that the weak and helpless — have trained help — nurses specially trained for the work — and not inexperienced persons.

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What training has Daisy had for any such work so this that would justify us — or the Red Cross Authorities in allowing her to go to Cuba? — even if there was no risk to herself. None worth considering.

Now I respect and honor the sentiment that leads Daisy to wish to be of use in this way — and I would be the last person to discourage her — in the absence of risk to herself. But, under the circumstances, to allow her to go to Cuba would be culpable indeed upon our part.

But if she wants to nurse the wounded soldiers — she need not despair. You don't suppose that the wounded will be kept in Cuba any longer than can be helped! They will be sent to their own homes — or at least to Hospitals in the United States and these hospitals will be in the most healthful places too.

If Daisy was only trained for the work I should have no objection to her doing good in this way. I don't know of course what Daisy's ideas or wishes are — excepting so far as I can imagine them from your startling telegram. This War won't be over in a day. The volunteers have been called out for two years — and much bloody work lies before them! There is time for preparation if Daisy's heart inclines that way.

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My advice there is — let her join an Ambulance Class — let her learn how to nurse — to begin with — and if she chooses let her have practice in nursing, where there is no danger to herself. The knowledge and the practice will be of use to her all of her life — even though she should not be called upon for services to our wounded boys. Let her take the first rational step — prepare . Then — if she desires to go further — opportunities will arise for usefulness — and if she wished to help in hospital work — or if she wished to turn our house into a private hospital of her own for our wounded boys (!) — I would be the last to object.

Your loving husband, Alec.